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ABSTRACT

The expected dramatic increase in the number of elderly people will bring with it an equally dramatic demand for increasing amounts of care and assistance for those who are manifesting the frailties of old age. This study assessed the level of concern or anxiety manifested by young adults when asked to consider their assumption of care responsibilities for aging parents. Since there is some evidence that parental care responsibilities may be viewed differently by black and white adult children, differences in black and white college students in their concern over the prospect of caring for elderly parents were explored. Subjects (N=154), of whom 125 were white and 29 were black, were college students from intact two-parent families. Each student was administered the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory completing an anxiety scale relative to the likelihood of having to provide services to elderly parents. The results of the study indicated that anticipation of caregiving responsibilities for a parent in the future was very anxiety-provoking for white college students but aroused little apprehension among black students. White students should be far more amenable to education efforts aimed at helping them cope with such feelings. The lack of anxiety manifested by black students indicates a tolerance of the responsibilities of a caregiving role. (ABL)

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Concern of Black and White College Students over Expected Parental Caregiver Role

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By the year 1990, the ratio of those over 65 will be 1:5, and, by 2025, the ratio will increase to 1:3 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983). The dramatic increase in the number of elderly people will bring with it an equally dramatic demand for increasing amounts of care and assistance by those who are manifesting simply the "frailties" of old age. Already, 80% of the care for the aged needing some type of assistance is provided by members of their families (Brody, 1986). Brody (1985) argues that "parent care has become a normative but stressful experience for individuals and families and that its nature, scope, and consequences are not yet fully understood" (1985, p. 19). Lieberman (1978) found the most frequently provided services to be: (a) seeing that health needs are met, (b) shopping, (c) contributing financial support, (d) providing living arrangements, (e) listening to problems, and (f) visiting on a regular basis. If such care responsibilities are to be met with minimal stress, children will have to make long term plans for the care responsibilties that will be theirs. Cantor (1983) has asserted that, "only by decoupling various groups of caregivers and examining their respective characteristics and strains can we provide intervention modalities which strengthen their individual capacities to assist the elderly in their care" (p. 597). To understand how best to prepare children for the care responsibilities their parents will pose, it is important to determine when children develop an awareness and/or concern for these potential responsibilities.

Cicirelli (1981, 1988) found that adult children seemed to be worried about the extent to which help might be needed by their parents in

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the future and whether they would be able to manage this burden. The present study was designed to assess the level of concern or anxiety manifested by young adults when asked to consider their assumption of care responsibilities for aging parents. Since there is some evidence (Martin and Martin, 1978; McAdoo, 1978; Troll, 1971) that parental care responsibilities may be viewed differently by black and white adult children, differences between black and white college students in their concern or anxiety over the prospect of caring for elderly parents were explored. Also explored was the effect of experience in some type of caregiving role with an elderly person upon the concern or anxiety felt by young adults when consideration was given to providing care in the future for aging parents.

Method

Subjects: Subjects were selected from undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a southern university. Each student was asked to provide information on age, race, gender, maritial status of parents, and previous experience in a caregiving role for an elderly person. Only students from homes in which both parents were living were selected for use in the study. Students whose parents were divorced were not included in the study

Procedure: To obtain an empirical measure of anxiety or concern, each student was administered the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger, 1983). This test, which has well established reliability and validity, provides an objective measure of Trait Anxiety (T-Anxiety), which is defined as general "anxiety proneness", and State Anxiety (S-Anxiety), which is the anxiety experienced in relation to a particular situation. Following completion of the T-Anxiety scale, subjects were asked to complete the S-Anxiety scale relative to the

likelihood of having to provide the services listed by Lieberman (1978) to a widowed, elderly parent.

Results

A total of 154 students from intact homes were included in this study. Of these, 125 were white and 29 were black. They ranged in age from 17 to 25 years. Of the 125 white subjects, 41 (32.8%) had had previous caregiving experiences while, of the 29 black subjects, 17 (52.8%) had had such experiences.

Black students achieved a mean score of 40.00 with a standard deviation of 10.08 on T-Anxiety while the mean score on this scale for white students was 36.72 with a standard deviation of 8.59. On S-Anxiety, black students achieved a mean score of 38.79 with a standard deviation of 10.99. The mean score on this scale for white students was 44.50 with a standard deviation of 14.13.

In comparison to the normative scores for T-Anxiety and S-Anxiety provided for college students (Spielberger, 1983), scores for black students on T-Anxiety did not differ significantly, $t(28) = .89$, $p>.10$ while scores for white students were significantly lower than the mean scores of the normative sample, $t(124) = -9.61$, $p<.001$. For S-Anxiety, scores for black students again did not differ from the scores of the normative sample, $t(28) = 1.42$, $p>.05$, while white students demonstrated scores that were significantly higher than those of the normative sample, $t(124) = 20.42$, $p<.001$.

A 2 x 2 analysis of covariance was performed using T-Anxiety scores as the covariate and race and previous caregiver experience as the independent variables. S-Anxiety scores served as the dependent variable. White students scored significantly higher than did black students on S-Anxiety in relation to the caregiving scenario, $F(1, 149) = 6.7$, $p=.011$, but there

was no main effect for previous caregiver role, $F(1, 149) = .13$, $p=.72$. There was no interaction effect, $F(1,149) = 2.04$, $p=.15$.

The findings of this study clearly indicate that important differences exist between black and white college students in the anxiety they experience when they consider having to care for their parents in the future. While both black and white students demonstate average or below average levels of general anxiety (T-Anxiety), white students demonstrated a level of S-Anxiety sigificantly higher than that demonstrated by black students. Apparently the anticipation of providing parental care arouses little apprehension in black students but substantial anxiety among white students. This high level of anxiety of white students is emphasized when it is noted that the general anxiety proneness of these students, as evidenced by their T-Anxiety scores, was significantly lower than usually found among college students.

Having provided some level of care for an elderely relative in the past had no apparent effect upon the level of anxiety experienced by black or white students relative to future care responsibilities. While it seems reasonable to assume that such experience would provide a familiarity with the burdens of caregiving that would lessen anxiety, such was not found to be the case.

The results of this study lead to the conclusion that the anticipation of caregiving responsibilities for a parent in the future was very anxiety-provoking for white college students but aroused little apprehension among black students. White students should be far more amenable to education efforts aimed at helping them cope with such feelings. On the other hand, their high level of anxiety may make them defensively prone to avoid consideration of future demands upon them for caregiving. These

possibilities need to be explored if techniques are to be developed that will assist adult children in adaptive preparation for parental caregiving responsibilities. The lack of anxiety manifested by black students indicates a tolerance of or adjustment to the responsibilities of a caregiving role. An understanding of the mechanisms underlying such tolerance or adjustment might provide information that would be useful in assisting white students in coping with their concern over being a caregiver. On the other hand, the lack of anxiety may signal an indifference to future caregiving responsibilities. Should further research demonstrate this to be the case, then an understanding of the aspects of caregiving that so concern white students could be employed to stimulate a more adaptive level of concern for future caregiving responsibilities among black students. The results support Cantor's assertion (1983) that groups of caregivers may differ and that the characteristics of these different groups must be understood if strategies are to be devised that assist future caregivers to fulfill such roles in a way meaningful to both them and their elderly parents.

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